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WASHINGTON POST
18 November 1986

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Captured Mercenaries Claim CIA Link

Eight American mercenaries were caught running guns off the coast of Brazil last spring in what they claim was a joint U.S.-Israeli covert operation to overthrow the Marxist government of Ghana.

Like Eugene Hasenfus, the American captured in Nicaragua after his weapons-carrying cargo plane crashed last month, the eight men being held in a Brazilian jail said they were working for the CIA. Unlike the not-so-secret Nicaraguan war that Hasenfus was fighting, however, there has been no publicity about any U.S. role in an attempted invasion of the West African nation of Ghana.

If information that family members have received from the imprisoned men is accurate, the United States was involved with Israel, Argentina and possibly South Africa in a scheme to topple Jerry Rawlings, the military dictator of Ghana. Here is the story, pieced together by our reporters Corky Johnson and Robert Young:

In mid-March, Brazilian police seized the Argentine freighter *Norbistor*, loaded with machine guns, grenades, rafts and other military hardware, and arrested the eight Americans on board.

In letters and a diary sent to their families, the men say they were part of a CIA operation to pick up about 100 Ghanaian rebels off the Ivory Coast, train them and then launch a seaborne attack on Ghana next door. The expedition began in Miami and from there the eight—all Vietnam veterans—flew to Argentina. There, according to the prisoners' statements, they acquired the ship and weapons with the aid of Argentine military and intelligence officials. Two of the mercenaries, Steve

Hedrick and Tim Carmody, said the operation was controlled by a man named Solomon, whom they believed to be an agent of Mossad, the Israeli secret service. He reportedly worked out of Bophuthatswana International Ltd., a suspected joint CIA/Mossad front in New York City.

The Justice Department lists the firm as a registered agent of the so-called "Republic of Bophuthatswana," a black tribal region of South Africa. The company appears to be doing business as B International at a Madison Avenue address.

Company President Ronald Greenwald said neither he nor his company was involved in an anti-Ghana mission.

Greenwald said a man named Solomon Schwartz worked out of his office, but had no connection with his company. Schwartz said he wasn't the Solomon the mercenaries named, but he has conceded having ties to the U.S. intelligence community. Court records show he was accused in 1984 of charges similar to those arising from the Ghana fiasco, according to David Kirby, a U.S. attorney in New York. As a result, Schwartz faces trial in February on charges of shipping military equipment to Argentina during the Falklands war and selling weapons to Eastern European nations.

The CIA and countries implicated by the mercenaries in the alleged plot against Ghana have denied involvement.

The State Department described the eight Americans as "free agents." But a diary kept by one of them gives persuasive details to bolster their claim that they acted in an officially sanctioned capacity—or firmly believed they did.